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THIS CASE STUDY ANALYZES THE OPERATIONAL ART AS PRACTICED BY THE COMMANDER, THIRD ARMY, GENERAL GEORGE S. PATTON, JR., DURING THE BATTLE OF THE BULGE (DEC 16, 1944-JAN 29, 1944). THE OPERATIONAL ART AS PRACTICED BY PATTON DURING THIS OPERATION HAS SIGNIFICANT IMPLICATIONS TO THE CONTEMPORARY MILITARY SINCE THE PLANNING AND EXECUTION WAS COMPLETED IN A CRISIS SITUATION THE BATTLE OF THE BULGE EXEMPLIFIES THE IMPORTANCE THE PRACTICE OF THE OPERATIONAL ART PLAYS IN LINKING TACTICAL ACTIONS TO STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES AS AN ALLIED FAILURE WOULD HAVE HAD STRATEGICAL IMPLICATIONS. THE ALLIED CHAIN OF COMMAND CLEARLY UNDERSTOOD THE OPERATIONAL OBJECTIVES AND CORRECTLY JUDGED THE ENEMY'S CENTER OF GRAVITY. PATTON WAS ABLE TO ACHIEVE THOSE OBJECTIVES AS A RESULT OF EARLY PLANNING. THIS EARLY PLANNING WAS A RESULT OF EFFECTIVELY UTILIZING INTELLIGENCE IN HIS AREAS OF INTEREST TO ANTICIPATE THE GERMAN COUNTEROFFENSIVE. AS A RESULT, SURPRISE WAS ACHIEVED BY SURPRISE.

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THE OPERATIONAL ART AS PRACTICED BY GENERAL GEORGE PATTON, JR.
DURING THE BATTLE OF THE BULGE

submitted by

R.C. CLAFLIN
LTC, U.S. Army

A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

Signature: *R. C. Claflin*

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Abstract of
THE OPERATIONAL ART AS PRACTICED BY GENERAL GEORGE PATTON, JR.
DURING THE BATTLE OF THE BULGE

This case study analyzes the operational art as practiced by the Commander, Third Army, General George S. Patton, Jr., during the Battle of the Bulge (December 16, 1944-January 29, 1945). As part of the Allied Campaign in the European Theater of Operations, the Battle of the Bulge was an Allied counterattack against a major German counteroffensive into the Ardennes. Although best known for individual and tactical unit actions, the Battle of the Bulge was primarily successful because the Allied Commanders, especially Patton, applied operational thinking to the planning and execution of the operation. The operational art as practiced by Patton during this operation has significant implications to the contemporary military since the counterattack planning and execution was completed in a crisis situation. The lessons learned from Patton's planning and execution is still applicable today and in the future for crisis operations. Therefore, this study focuses on Patton's actions. The Battle of the Bulge exemplifies the importance the practice of the operational art plays in linking tactical actions to strategic objectives as an Allied failure would have had strategical implications. The Allied chain of command clearly understood the operational objectives and correctly judged the enemy's center of gravity. Patton was able to achieve those objectives by early planning. This early planning was the result of effectively utilizing intelligence in his areas of interest to anticipate the German counteroffensive. He further demonstrated remarkable agility in turning his Army 90-degrees to attack. This agility, combined with speed of maneuver, resulted in a surprised enemy. Of paramount importance is the fact that this speed of maneuver included not only combat and combat support units, but also combat service support units. Although reluctant to maintain operational reserves, Patton exhibited his prowess in conducting combined and joint operations. Finally, Patton's use of operational fires was instrumental in the successful execution of the Battle of the Bulge.

PREFACE

Many of the sources listed in the Bibliography were authored in the years immediately following the end of World War II. The majority of the sources were written by historians; however, in order to develop balanced conclusions, a determined effort was made to utilize sources from the American Commanders directly involved in the Battle of the Bulge. The works by Generals Eisenhower and Bradley were invaluable in providing the linkage between the operational and strategic levels. The sources by General Patton were just as invaluable in providing insight into his operational and tactical thinking. The biographies of Patton complimented the works by the Generals as they offered a different perspective than that of the military commanders. Finally, the works by Bauer, Cole, and Sulzberger were utilized to provide a historical perspective.

Interestingly, the sources disagreed on some factual information. Some historians treated the Battle of the Bulge as completed when Bastogne was relieved. There are also some sources that the decision to attack Bastogne as an objective was made only after Third Army commenced its attack on December 22, 1944. In both instances, I was obviously compelled to rely on the accounts of the three military commanders. All three considered the Battle of the Bulge as the relief of Bastogne and then the cleaning of the salient. All three further agreed that the decision to assign Bastogne as Patton's initial objective and Houffalize as the sequel was made at the Verdun conference of December 19, 1944.

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THE OPERATIONAL ART AS PRACTICED BY GENERAL GEORGE PATTON, JR. DURING THE BATTLE OF THE BULGE

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Problem. One of the early casualties of the Vietnam War, a War dominated by tactical operations, was the practice and study of the operational art. For the U.S. military and the Army in particular, the years following this national debacle had been a period of revitalization--one of reflection, soul-searching, and rebuilding. Paramount to this revitalization of U.S. military might was the resurgence of the study of the operational art. The publication in 1982 of the Army's first FM 100-5, *Operations*, spawned a myriad of historical studies and comparisons that soon were being digested and debated in all of the Army schoolhouses as to their implications in the application of the operational art in modern war.

This period of revitalization of the U.S. military and resurgence of the study of the operational art was stunningly capped with the American led coalition victory in Desert Storm. Politically, the final chapter has not yet been written in regards to Saddam Hussein. Militarily, the early returns indicate that the successful application of the operational art during this conflict, and thus the resultant victory, found its seeds in these earlier historical studies and comparisons. Thus, it is only appropriate in light of Desert Storm that we continue these historical studies and comparisons. We can not rest on our laurels and must rigorously pursue the study of historical cases and their implications for the contemporary military's preparations for the application of the operational art, especially as applied in today's joint environment amidst an ever growing technological evolution.

As the world approaches the fiftieth anniversary of the end of World War II, no clearer implications can be found for today's fight than those derived by an analysis of one of the

fiercest fought operations of that war, the Battle of the Bulge. The Battle of the Bulge, fought from December 16, 1944 until January 29, 1945, was undeniably a major setback to the Allied drive to defeat Nazi Germany. Considered by many to be a last gasp effort by Hitler and by others as a brilliant strategic stroke, the major counteroffensive initiated by three German Armies on December 16, 1944 certainly blunted the Allied offensive and came extremely close to unhinging the Allied strategic plan. At a minimum, the results of this hotly contested operation were heavy casualties on both sides and a prolongation of the war.

The study of this operation and an analysis of the operational art as practiced during that crisis driven operation by one of America's most well known generals, General George S. Patton, Jr., is significant in its implications to the contemporary military. Lessons learned from the study of Patton's practice of the operational art during the Battle of the Bulge are still applicable to today's fluid battlefield. The decisions, plans, and the execution of this operation were all completed in a crisis environment. Time was critical and the trading of space for time had political implications. The eventual success of the operation was instrumental in preventing the probable rupture of the Allied coalition and in bringing World War II to a successful end.

Organization. This case study analyzes the Allied reaction to the German counteroffensive, and in particular, the operational art as practiced by General Patton during the Battle of the Bulge. This study analyzes the strategic framework, from both the Allied and German side, and includes a short synopsis of Third Army actions prior to the initiation of the Battle of the Bulge. An analysis is conducted of the German plan to execute the counteroffensive and the subsequent Allied decisions to counter this plan. The operational art as applied by Patton to the planning and execution of the operation is then analyzed. Finally, an analysis is conducted of the applicability of the lessons learned to the contemporary military.

CHAPTER II

THE FRAMEWORK

Allied Strategic Considerations. The strategy of placing the priority of effort on defeating the Nazis while basically conducting economy of force actions in the Pacific was the Allied grand strategy at the beginning of World War II and had not changed over the course of the war. All Allied nations agreed on this grand strategy. However, there had not been unanimous agreement on the strategy needed to defeat the Nazis. Strategic differences on the conduct of the war in the European Theater of War had existed among the Allies since the United States entered the war in December, 1941. The Americans had argued that a direct attack on northern Europe was the best strategy to defeat Germany. The British on the other hand, although agreeing that an attack on northern Europe was inevitable, had maintained that a cross-Channel invasion of northern Europe was too risky until the playing field had been leveled.¹ Thus, until the Casablanca Conference in January, 1943, the Allied priority of effort in the European Theater of War had been in the Mediterranean Theater of Operations. The Casablanca Conference finally produced an Allied agreement "that the Allies should plan for a full-scale invasion in 1944, and that either a Supreme Commander or a Chief-of-Staff, with a nucleus staff, should be appointed without delay."²

Concurrent with this agreement was the announcement by President Roosevelt of the United States that the political goal (read military objective) of the Allied war effort was unconditional surrender of Japan and Germany. Needless to say, this announcement was extremely controversial and was to have a significant impact on military operations for the remainder of the war.³ The agreement for an invasion and the announced political goal of unconditional surrender finally evolved, only after more conferences and disagreements, a year later into clear-cut strategic objectives in the European Theater of Operations. On February

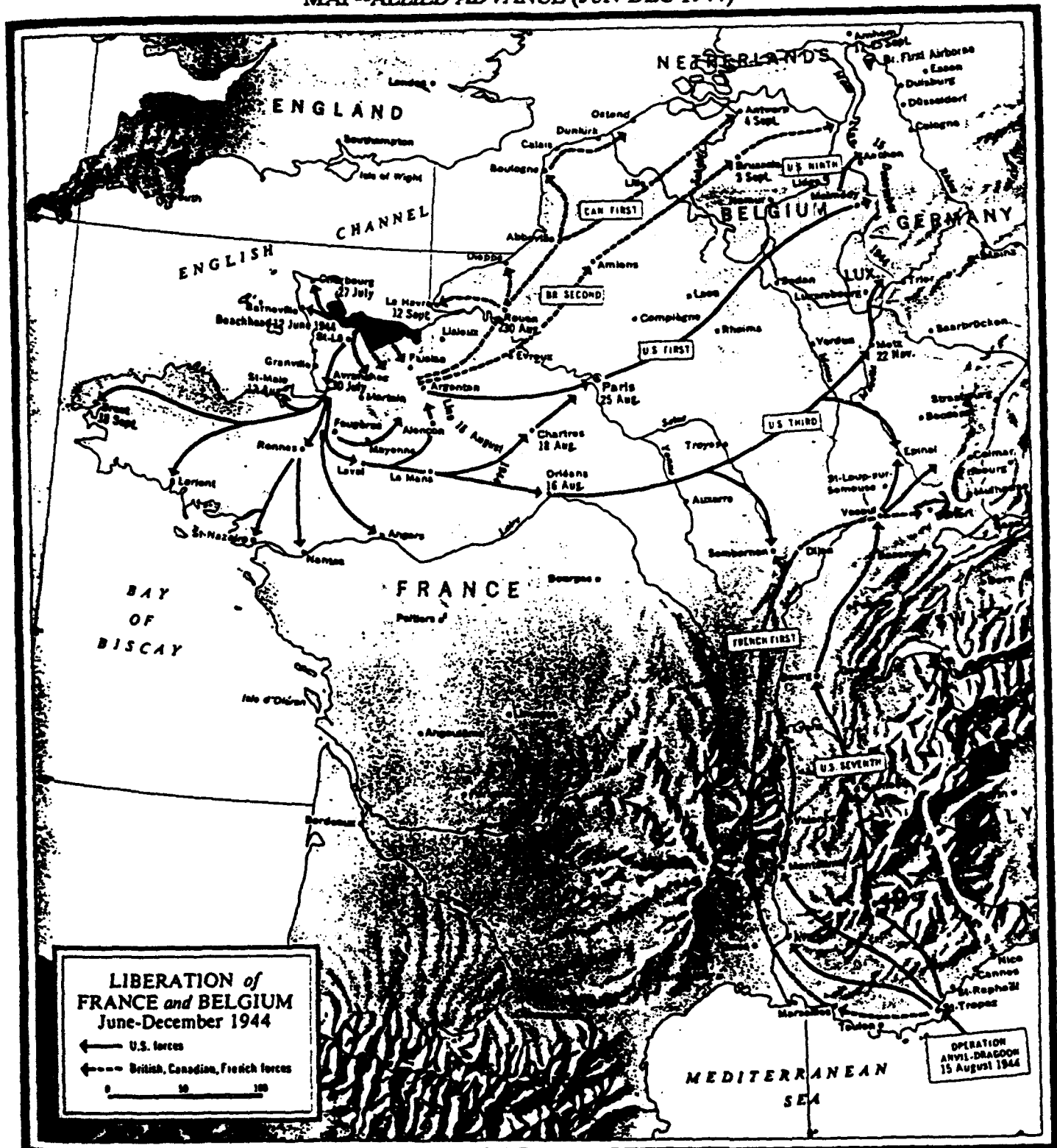
12, 1944, General Dwight D. Eisenhower, Commander, Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF) was ordered: "You will enter the continent of Europe and, in conjunction with the other United Nations, undertake operations aimed at the heart of Germany and the destruction of her armed forces."⁴

The desired end state then was a vision of a defeated German military force with political considerations (thus, the unconditional surrender controversy) subjugated to this vision. The campaign plan adopted by SHAEF to achieve the strategic objectives and thus, this end state, was designed to destroy the German strategic center of gravity--the German Army.

Operationally, the Allied phased campaign was to be fought directly against this strength (although one could argue in a twisted way that the German Army on the Western Front was actually a vulnerability since the Nazis were fighting a two front war) while the air campaign was to be fought against a strategically vulnerable industrial complex. The Allies, fighting this campaign plan in the late summer and fall of 1944 had entered the continent of Europe, broke out of the Normandy beachhead, and conducted a controversial "broad front offensive" to liberate France and Belgium. (Figure 1) On the eve of the Battle of the Bulge, SHAEF had initiated offensive actions designed to drive into the heartland of Germany in order to achieve the final objective of the destruction of the German armed forces.

Third Army. The Third Army that fought the Battle of the Bulge had been major contributors to the Allied effort and had been in constant contact since early August, 1944. During this time, Third Army had fought three distinct major operations that included the breakout from Normandy, the drive through France, and the Saar Campaign. On the eve of the Battle of the Bulge, Third Army had already assisted in the liberation of France, fought its way to the Saar River, and was abreast the Siegfried Line poised for, in fact had initiated, a drive to the Rhine River. In the process, Third Army had inflicted 384,000 casualties, including prisoners, on the Nazi Army.⁵

FIGURE 1
MAP--ALLIED ADVANCE (JUN-DEC 1944)



Source: Sulzerberger, *The American Heritage Picture History of WW II*, p.487.

The Germans fighting the Ardennes counteroffensive were to face a Third Army that had been tried and tested under fire. Third Army was obviously well-trained as a result of these trials and tribulations. Patton's staff was well-oiled and worked as a team. Third Army soldiers had suffered many hardships, but they had fought well and had gained a great deal of respect as a result of their spectacular offensive dashes across the continent. Just as importantly, the soldiers and staff had come to respect, if not understand, their commander. The soldiers were no longer members of such and such battalion or division. They were members of Third Army and "had rolled with Patton".⁶

German Strategic Considerations. On the other side, Hitler had been fighting a strategic defense on all fronts since the Allied invasion of the continent. One can not with any certainty ascertain what Hitler's political objectives were in December, 1944. Whether he still had a vision of Eurasian domination or whether he had modified this vision to one of German survival will probably never be known. However, what is known is that given his military situation in December, 1944, he would have to successfully attack his enemy's strategic center of gravity, the Allied coalition, if he was to attain any positive political objectives. To accomplish this goal, he would have to in some manner split the members of the coalition. Furthermore, if he was to defeat the operational center of gravity on the Western Front, be it General Bradley's Central Group of Armies or Field Marshal Montgomery's Northern Group of Armies, the Nazis would have to successfully attack the Allies' most glaring vulnerability which was their logistics bases. Whether the German plan for their counteroffensive into the Ardennes contained these considerations is irrelevant, that the counteroffensive could have succeeded in exploiting either one or both of these Allied vulnerabilities is not irrelevant.

CHAPTER III

THE REACTION

In war, the will is directed at an animate object that reacts.'

--Clausewitz

The Allied ground forces, during the Battle of the Bulge, was the animate object that reacted. From an operational art perspective, it is the reaction that deserves study and contains implications for today's fight. The Battle of the Bulge was not a set piece operation. The operation required crisis decisions, planning, and execution. Time was of essence and political considerations impacted on the ability to trade space for time. This chapter analyzes the German actions and the Allied Commanders' decisions to react to those actions.

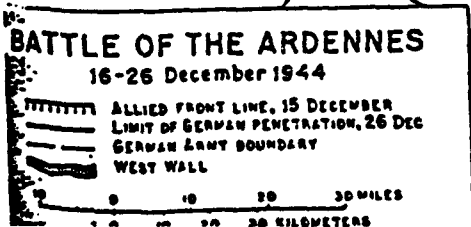
The German Will. The first glimmerings that a counteroffensive was to be launched in the west can be found as early as July 31, 1944 in a long tirade made by Hitler before high ranking German officers. "As he meanders through the conference, really a solo performance, one idea reappears again and again: the final decision must come in the west and if necessary the other fronts must suffer so that a concentrated, major effort can be made there."⁸ From this early meandering, detailed planning for the German counteroffensive began in September, 1944. The counteroffensive, *Watch am Rhein* (Watch on the Rhine) was to be an attack made through the Ardennes in the Monschau-Echternach sector with the initial objective being the seizure of bridgeheads over the Meuse River between Liege and Namur. The attack was to be conducted with a minimum of thirty divisions, ten of which would be armored, through the Ardennes against a weak link on the Allied front. Operational control was to be vested in four armies--two panzer armies abreast in the lead with two armies composed largely of infantry divisions covering the flanks.⁹ The ultimate operational objective was Antwerp serving the purpose of "severing Eisenhower's supply lines and perhaps sufficiently demoralizing the West to prepare the way for a negotiated peace."¹⁰

The German plan was executed with two main thrusts advancing on a 45-mile front from Echternach, northwest of Trier, to Monchau, southeast of Aachen. The attack was initiated on December 16, 1944 by German Army Group B with three Armies consisting of 21 divisions. The Sixth SS Panzer Army made a northern thrust with Liege and its huge supply dumps as its objective. To the south, the Fifth Panzer Army attacked with the objective of capturing Namur which was a key Allied communications center. The German Seventh Army conducted a diversionary attack south of Echternach with the mission to roll up the Allied line in this area and to protect the southern flank of the Fifth Panzer Army. The remaining Army (Fifteenth Army) assigned to Army Group B conducted economy of force actions in the northern sector to fix the U.S. First and Ninth Armies.¹¹ (Figure 2)

The Allied Reaction. The counteroffensive gained definite surprise in two important ways. The first of these ways was the timing. Extraordinary defeats had been inflicted by the Allies upon the Nazis during the late summer and fall of 1944. The Allied Command had felt the enemy did not have the time to marshal the required resources to mount a counteroffensive. Local counterattacks had been expected and experienced; but, the Allies certainly did not expect the Germans to launch a major counteroffensive. The second of these ways was the strength of the counteroffensive. As the mobile reserve, the Sixth Panzer Army was a fresh and strong unit that had only recently arrived on the Western Front from Germany. The other Armies executing the counteroffensive had been seriously attrited by the Allies in earlier actions.¹²

Considering the degree of surprise, the Allied Commanders were remarkably cool and confident when they gathered in Verdun on the morning of December 19, 1944 to decide on a course of action. Developments had been closely examined and options wargamed on December 17 and December 18. By the time of the conference, the Allied Commanders felt they had sufficient intelligence on the enemy's dispositions and intentions to arrive at a decision. Key players at the conference were General Eisenhower (Supreme Commander,

MAP--ARDENNES COUNTEROFFENSIVE



Source: Pogue, The Supreme Command, p.373.

SHAEF), Air Chief Marshal Tedder (Deputy Supreme Commander, SHAEF), and Generals Bradley (Commander, Central Group of Armies [12th Army Group]) and Patton (Commander, Third Army). General Eisenhower opened the conference by remarking, "The present situation is to be regarded as one of opportunity for us and not disaster. There will be only cheerful faces at this conference table."¹³

The decision that was required revolved around two options. The Allies could assume a defensive position and withdraw to the Meuse River, a natural defensive barrier, or they could conduct offensive actions as soon as the required strength was gathered. The political price to be paid with a withdrawal was too high of a price to pay. Also, as indicated in Eisenhower's remarks, the salient (Bulge), created as a result of the counteroffensive, was an opportunity to inflict a great deal of punishment on the German Army. Eisenhower decided to hold and plug the holes of the Nazi thrust in the north and to launch a coordinated attack from the south. In order to gather the force needed for a coordinated attack, Eisenhower ordered all offensive actions south of the Moselle halted. He further turned over the entire Third Army sector (except for that occupied by XX Corps) to General Dever's Sixth Army Group.¹⁴ Given the strategic objective of the destruction of Germany's armed forces, this offensive decision was appropriate.

The Allied Commanders recognized that destruction of German Army Group B was the ultimate operational objective for the Battle of the Bulge. The destruction of the Sixth Panzer Army, recognized as the enemy center of gravity in the Ardennes area of operations, was further designated as an intermediate operational objective. By attacking through the weakened Fifteenth and Fifth Panzer Armies from the south with Patton's Third Army, the Allies would be threatening a vulnerability of the Sixth Panzer Army which was its southern flank. As an operational sequel to this attack into Sixth Panzer Army's flank, Third Army would continue the attack generally northeasterly to link-up with forces from Field Marshal Montgomery's Northern Group of Armies. This decision would cut the Sixth Panzer Army's lines of

communications (LOCs) and hasten the German counteroffensive reaching its culminating point.

With these decisions, the military conditions for success had been determined. General Patton's challenge was now to develop a sequence of actions that would achieve these military conditions. Furthermore, Patton had to apply his allocated resources to accomplish that sequence of actions, and he had to develop a plan that was fully cognizant of the risks involved and devise counters to reduce both the known and unknown risks.¹⁵

CHAPTER IV

PATTON'S PLANNING

*One does not plan and then try to make the circumstances fit those plans. One tries to make plans that fit the circumstance. I think the difference between success and failure in high command depends on that ability, or the lack of it, to do just that.*¹⁶

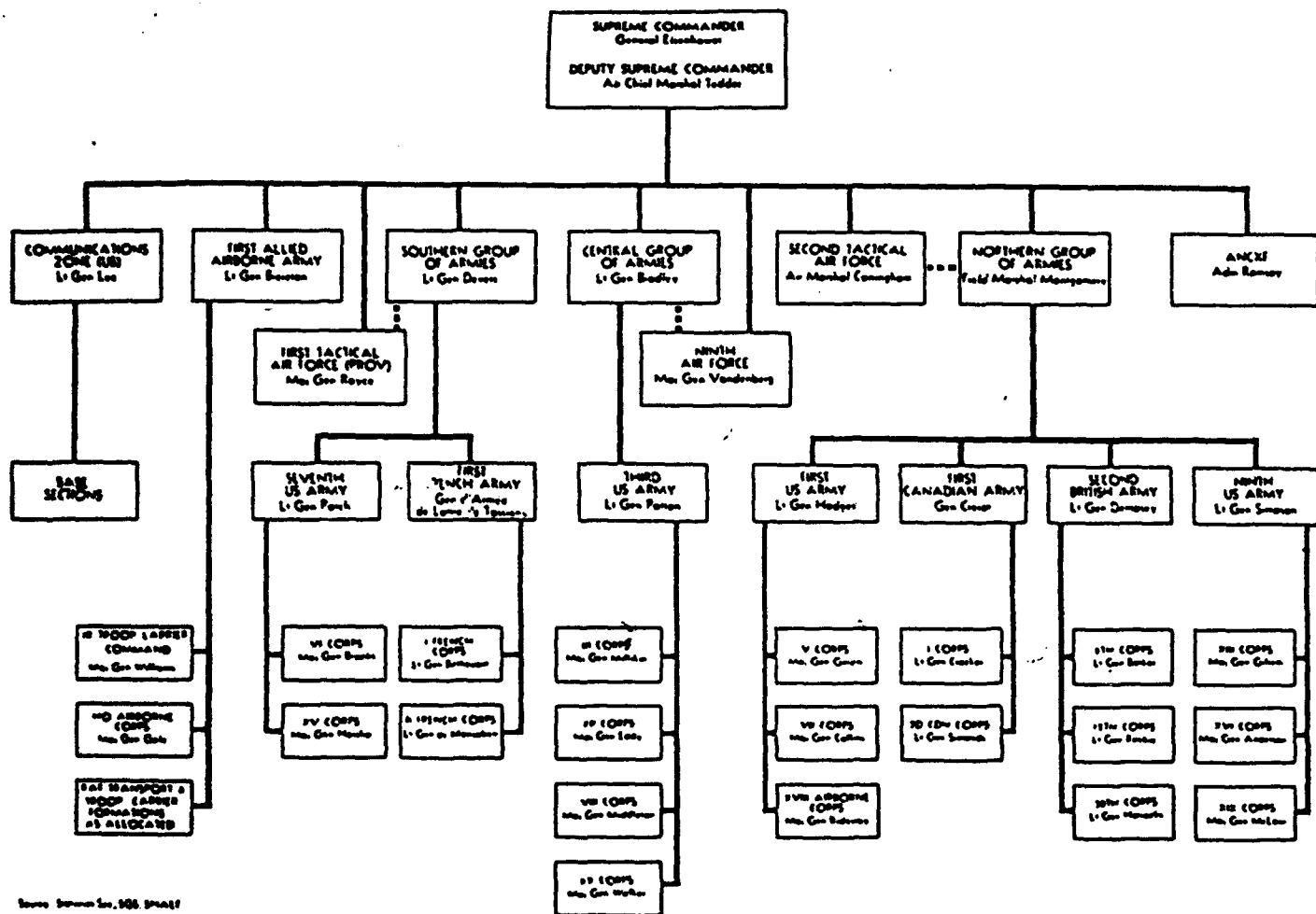
--Patton

Command and Control. General Eisenhower, as the Commander, SHAEF, operated at the theater strategical level. However, since the breakout of Normandy, he had worn a second hat as Commander, Allied Ground Component in the European Theater of Operations. In this capacity, he commanded at the strategical/operational level during the Battle of the Bulge. General Bradley was the Commander, Central Group of Armies (12th Army Group) and operated at the operational level. General Patton commanded operations in the overlapping area known as the operational/tactical level. The operational structure below Patton consisted of III Corps, XII Corps, and XX Corps which had been under Patton's command during the SAAR Campaign. For the Battle of the Bulge, Third Army also received operational control (OPCON) of VIII Corps. Third Army was supported by the Ninth Air Force. (Figure 3)

The operational chain of command was relatively simple and along national lines. From an operational perspective, the key commanders had trained together in peacetime, and more importantly, had fought together since entering the continent. This working familiarity and the unity of command facilitated the understanding of the higher commander's guidance and intent and greatly enhanced the unity of effort.

Higher's Guidance. General Patton's "objective was to inflict maximum damage on the German forces located in the salient. Equally important was a subsidiary mission: to relieve our forces at Bastogne, which were still holding out with magnificent courage."¹⁷ Patton was directed to concentrate his attacking forces in the general vicinity of Arlon and then to attack to

FIGURE 3
CHART--ALLIED OPERATIONAL CHAIN OF COMMAND



Source: Pogue, The Supreme Command, p. 379

the north to take the intermediate operational objective of Bastogne. Bastogne, as the major road hub, was the decisive point in the area of operations. Possession of this decisive point would either give the Germans a decided advantage in their push to the Meuse or the Allies the advantage in attacking the sequel objective of Houffalize. Houffalize, as the tactical objective for the sequel operations, was to be the linkup point for Patton's Third Army attacking from the south and forces from Field Marshal Montgomery's Northern Army Group attacking from the north. The capture of Houffalize would effectively cut the Sixth Panzer Army's LOCs and greatly facilitate the Allies' fight to destroy the Sixth Panzer Army.¹⁸ Clear-cut military objectives and the desired end state had been established.

Intelligence and Areas of Interest. Patton had already devised a rough plan that certainly fit the circumstances prior to the receipt of his guidance on December 19, 1944. In spite of the intelligence failures at General Eisenhower's SHAEF headquarters and General Bradley's Central Army Group headquarters in predicting the German counteroffensive, Patton had already developed this plan because of his insistence that his Intelligence Officer (G-2) habitually stay abreast of the enemy situation in Third Army's areas of interest. Operationally, Patton had always insisted on intelligence coverage up to 150-miles from his flanks. This distance represented the limits of the army's tactical reconnaissance and also was the maximum limit of a day's motor march by enemy troops that could possibly show up in front of Third Army.¹⁹ So, in effect, Third Army usually had the intelligence about any enemy activities to its flanks that could possibly influence its own actions.

As early as November 23, 1944, the Third Army G-2 had noted the beginnings of a Nazi build-up to the north of Third Army. On December 11, 1944 Third Army intelligence concluded the Germans definitely had the capability to launch a spoiling offensive and it would most likely be mounted in the Ardennes against the U.S. VIII Corps, just north of Third Army's northern flank. Weighing both enemy capabilities and intentions (later events would show he weighed correctly), Patton on December 12, 1944, in anticipation of a German

counteroffensive, "decided definitely to place the 6th Armored and the 26th Division in the III Corps near Saarbrücken, because, if the enemy attacked the VIII Corps of the First Army, as was probable, I could use the III Corps to help by attacking straight north, west of the Moselle River."²⁰ That same day Patton ordered his staff to conduct a study on what actions the Third Army could take if requested to counterattack a breakthrough to the north of Third Army.²¹ Therefore, the amazing operational agility later exhibited by Patton in changing the direction of his Army by 90-degrees and attacking within 48-hours was not the result of blind luck or premonition. This agility was the result of intuition and properly utilizing intelligence by understanding what his area of operations were and ensuring that he had eyes and ears on those areas of interest that could influence his operations. He then exercised a clear understanding of battle command through decision making, "knowing if to decide, then when and what to decide."²² Patton's intuitive decision making reflected the "art" and not the "science" of operational command.

Concept of Operations. General Patton was an avid proponent of simplicity. He suggested that army orders not exceed a page and a half of typewritten page. He believed they could usually be done on one page with a sketch map on the back. He further believed that these orders should tell what to do, not how to do it.²³ Operationally, synchronization of both the move and the fight of the forces involved would be the greatest challenge faced by Patton in the development of a concept of operations for the Battle of the Bulge. The concept that was developed adhered to the simplicity edict and met Patton's challenge.

The rough concept of operations developed by Patton and his staff, finalized the morning of and just prior to the Verdun conference, was based on the assumptions that he could use the VIII Corps from the First Army and the III Corps from his own Army on any two of three possible axes. From the left, the axes of attack were in order of priority as follows: "from the general vicinity of Diekirch due north; from the general vicinity of Arlon to Bastogne; and from the general vicinity of Neufchâteau against the western portion of the German penetration".²⁴ A

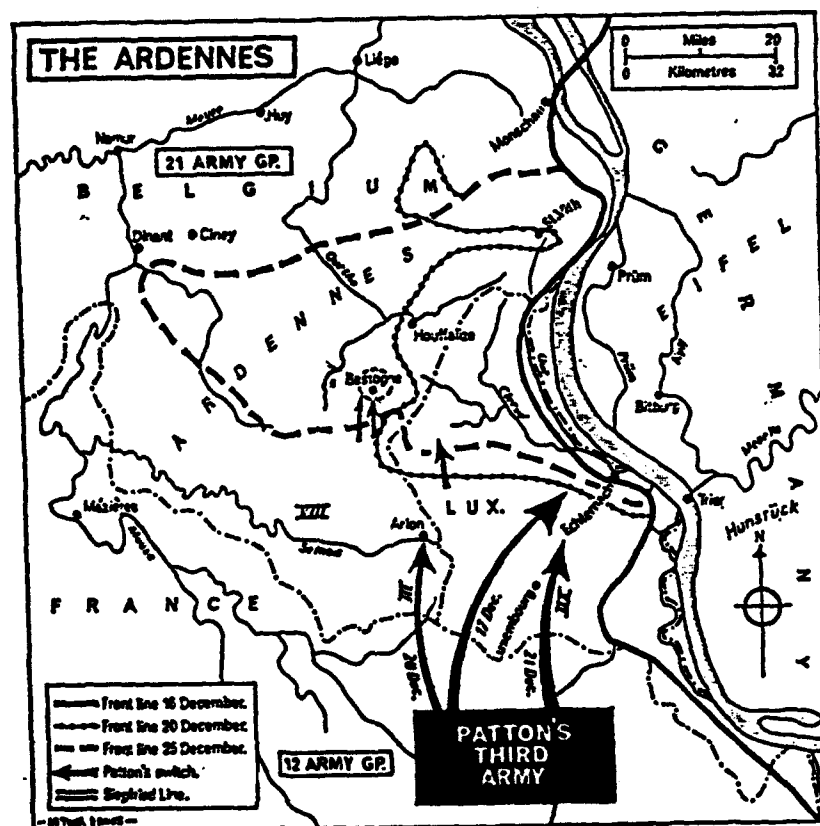
simple code was arranged before Patton departed for Verdun with which he could notify his staff by phone which axes would be utilized.

The final plan for the Bastogne (first) phase was relayed by Patton to his staff after the conference was finished. The plan was for the main effort to be conducted by III Corps up the Arlon-Bastogne road; XII Corps would disengage at once and attack to the north of the City of Luxembourg; and VIII Corps was to attack against the west nose of the salient.²⁵ XX Corps was to remain in place and conduct economy of force actions through aggressive defensive operations. The counterattack would be supported by the Ninth Air Force. III Corps was to commence its attack from Arlon on December 22 and XII Corps was to attack three days later. With this concept, Patton had developed a sequence of actions and concept of operations to achieve the first intermediate objective (Bastogne). (Figure 4) The sequel (second phase--Houffalize) planning was initiated after receiving guidance at Verdun; however, plans were not finalized until December 28 when the situation had stabilized.

The plan to capture Houffalize and linkup with elements of Field Marshal Montgomery's Northern Group of Armies was planned in detail, yet maintained simplicity. To attain this tactical objective, VIII Corps was designated as the main effort and directed to initiate its attack from the Bastogne area on December 30 with its tactical objective the high ground and road nexus just south of Houffalize. III Corps was to guard the right flank of VIII Corps by driving in the direction of St. Vith with operations commencing on December 31. In a further display of Patton's capacity for anticipation, he directed XII Corps to be prepared to attack across the Sauer River to the northeast to secure crossings over the Rhine River at Bonn as the entire Third Army swung to the northeast.²⁶

Central to both concepts of operations were maneuver and flexibility. For the plan to succeed, Patton would have to disengage two corps from contact, turn them 90-degrees, and move them from 50 to 75 miles. This movement would then have Third Army in position to gain positional advantage.²⁷ Third Army would have to possess the flexibility to accomplish

FIGURE 4
MAP--BASTOGNE CONCEPT OF OPERATIONS



Source: Essame, *Patton: A Study in Command*, p. 227.

this movement and then totally refocus on a new enemy and a new area of operations.

Although Patton would have to simultaneously conduct offensive and defensive operations, the attack was certainly consistent with Patton's conception of the operational art as continuous offensive actions. As Patton's Deputy Chief of Staff noted:

He (Patton) conducted American troops through three years of successful operations against the enemy. He never issued a defensive order. His theory--ATTACK, ATTACK, ATTACK, and, when in doubt, ATTACK again--shortened the war by never giving the enemy a chance to organize or reorganize enough to make a concerted attack against him.²⁸

Maneuver in order to attain the attack advantage was the strength that would also contribute vitally to the reduction of the risks associated with the concept of operations.

Risks. There were numerous risks associated with the plan for the execution of the Battle of the Bulge and were most evident in the plan to capture Bastogne. Although most of the risks were tactical in nature, they had operational and even strategical implications. Tactically, until XII Corps disengaged and initiated its attack on December 24, the main effort by III Corps, commencing on December 22, risked being a piecemeal rather than coordinated attack. Furthermore, this early attack placed III Corps at a numerical disadvantage with its right flank at risk. Operationally, the largest risk faced by Patton was created by the difficulty in synchronization as a result of the early attack by III Corps. This difficulty risked the protection of his forces. If Patton was unable to protect his forces, chances were great the counterattack would fail and the operational objective of Bastogne would not be achieved. The risk of this failure certainly had strategical implications. At a minimum, if this attack failed, resources would conceivably have had to be diverted from the Pacific Theater given the manpower shortage in the European Theater of Operations. Worst case, if this attack failed and the German counteroffensive succeeded, the Allied coalition risked fracturing.

General Patton planned to minimize these risks, and therefore the operational and strategical implications, through surprise. Specifically, Patton believed that a high operational tempo (OPTEMPO)--speed of maneuver--was the means to achieve surprise. While Patton

was certain the Germans expected a counterattack, he was just as certain they would not expect an attack within 48-hours. By convincing General Eisenhower to allow him to attack on December 22 with three divisions instead of waiting until some days later until he could attack with six, and that if he waited, he would lose surprise, Patton would be able to strike the Germans at an unexpected time.²⁹ Therefore, although the main effort was to be initiated three days prior to the supporting attack, the surprise achieved as a result would upset the German timetable and reduce the operational risk of being unable to protect the force.

Preparation. Time was of essence in the execution of the plan. Operationally, the only reliable intelligence available was from the reports of the Allied forces fighting in Bastogne since bad weather had grounded the Ninth Air Force. Time was not available to conduct any rehearsal of the plan; therefore, the period prior to the attack was devoted to moving troops and supplies. Although, on the whole, historians treat Patton's application of operational logistics in a bad light, he demonstrated a firm grasp of logistics in preparing for the Battle of the Bulge. In a letter of instruction (LOI) distributed to unit commanders in the spring of 1944, Patton notes: "The supply services must get the things asked for to the right place at the right time. They must do more: by reconnaissance they will anticipate demands and start the supplies up before they are called for."³⁰ This directive indicates a clear understanding of two key characteristics of operational logistics: responsiveness and anticipation.³¹ This understanding was amply demonstrated in preparing for the Battle of the Bulge.

Within a period of a few days, utilizing a limited road network and in the worst of weather, Third Army repositioned and issued a huge amount of supplies and services that were instrumental in establishing the conditions required for rapid maneuver and surprise. Between December 18th and 23rd, an entirely new supply system was established with scores of new depots and dumps. Over 130,000 motor vehicles traveled 1.6 million miles moving hundreds of combat and supply units and shifting 62,000 tons of supplies to include 19,000 tons of ammunition. Numerous field evacuation hospitals were transferred and erected in anticipation

of casualties. Hundreds of thousands of maps were issued and a new command and control system was established by laying over 20,000 miles of new wire.³² "It was all wrought quietly and efficiently by a teamwork without parallel in the ETO--a teamwork rooted deeply in great know-how, in great confidence in itself and its Commander, and in great fighting."³³ More importantly, it was wrought by a Commander who practiced the operational art by maneuvering logistics.

CHAPTER V

ATTACK

*Fill the unforgiving minute with sixty seconds worth of distance run.*³⁴

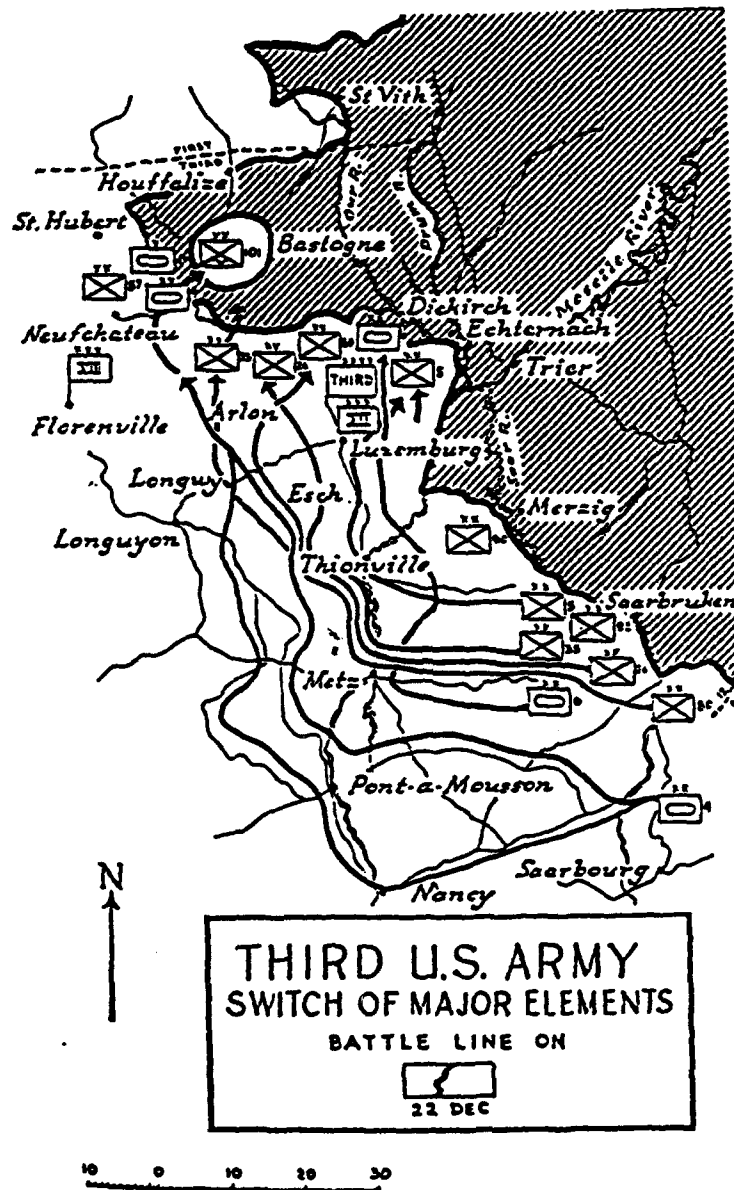
The execution of the Battle of the Bulge was somewhat of an untidy affair with a series of tactical engagements fought by small units. There were both operational strengths and weaknesses practiced by Patton during the execution. He demonstrated a great deal of competence in massing and applying combined arms in a joint environment. Using the air force and organic field artillery in mutually supporting roles, he was able to use operational fires as a force enhancer to shape the battlefield. On the negative side, although devising tactical means to lessen the impact, Patton assumed a huge risk by not maintaining operational reserves.

To Bastogne. By having the advantage of operating on interior lines while the Germans were operating on exterior lines, Third Army had rapidly disengaged from contact, pivoted 90-degrees, and were ready to commence the attack at 0600 hours on December 22. (Figure 5) III Corps kicked off the attack from the Arlon-Neufchateau road with two infantry divisions and an armored division. Operationally, this task organization is indicative of Patton's propensity to conduct combined arms operations. He firmly believed that armored divisions should be spread throughout his Army rather than retain them in one separate corps to be used . . . for the delivery of the final shock in some great battle . . ."³⁵

The situation on the immediate front was vague so the "attack" was really a movement to contact. III Corps soon struck stiff resistance and experienced a great deal of trouble from cratered roads and blown bridges; however, it was able to advance seven miles toward Bastogne. The next day brought good weather and the Ninth Air Force was able to add their weight to the fight.

Anticipating a counterattack by the Germans from the west against the City of Luxembourg

FIGURE 5
MAP--SWITCH OF THIRD ARMY UNITS



Source: Patton, *War As I Knew It*, p. 209.

on December 22, Patton ordered XII Corps to conduct a limited objective attack to drive the enemy east of the Sauer River, while XX Corps made another limited objective attack in the direction of Saarburg as a diversion.³⁶ By December 24, XII Corps on the right and south of the Sauer River had started its full offensive against the right shoulder of the Bulge. By now Patton had built up his supporting artillery to a total of 88 battalions consisting of 1,056 guns of 105mm and over, in addition to the organic artillery of the divisions. The terrain in the Ardennes canalized German movements and reduced artillery targets to a few chokepoints. Thus, this massive artillery capability, coupled with air strikes, was operationally used to fire a program of long-range harassing and interdicting fires on these chokepoints. As a result, the Germans were driven off the roads in daylight and had to do most of their movement at night.³⁷

On Christmas Day, the tide was slowly but definitely turning in the III Corps and XII Corps sectors. In the VIII Corps area, enemy attacks were strong as they pressed to reach the Meuse. At 1645 hours on December 26, III Corps broke the siege of Bastogne when Combat Command B of the 4th Armored Division reached Bastogne. The siege was over, but the battle for Bastogne was about to begin.³⁸ The battle for Bastogne lasted until January 8, 1945 as Third Army widened the corridor and repelled scores of German counterattacks. At the height of the struggle, elements of twelve German divisions were identified in the Bastogne sector. Additionally, seven other divisions had been in contact against VIII and XII Corps on the west and east. Patton had fought 17 enemy divisions and never had any operational reserve larger than a tank destroyer company.³⁹

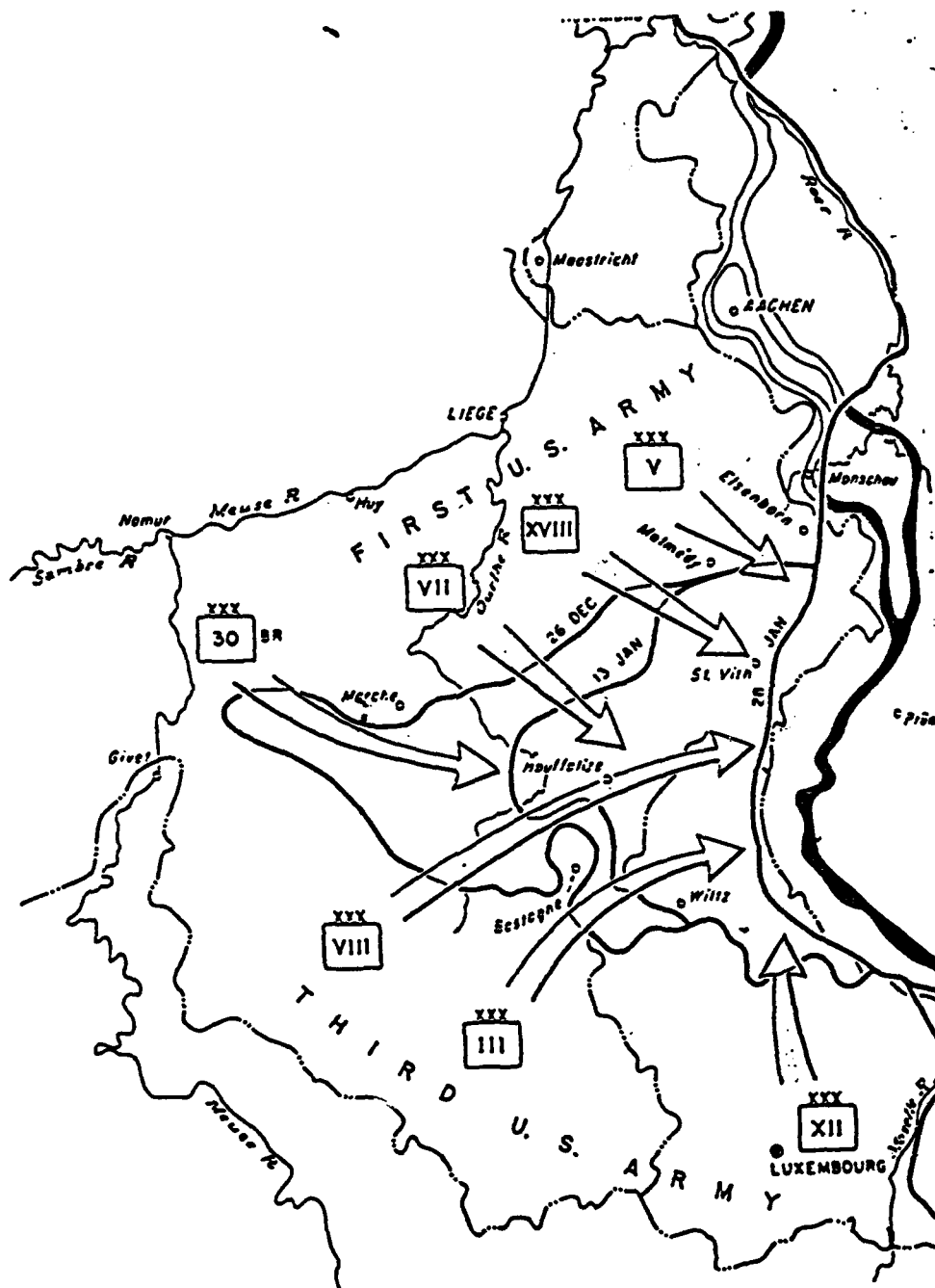
Patton's willingness to accept this operational risk is difficult to understand given the fluid and unknown situation when Third Army commenced its attack. Apparently, he believed that he reduced the risk by maintaining maximum combat forward as opposed to maintaining reserves to exploit the situation. By assigning all available combat forces to his Corps' Commanders, Patton was apparently willing to assume an elevated operational risk while lowering the risk at the tactical level.⁴⁰

To Houffalize. Compared to the fierce fighting involved in taking Bastogne, the attack to take the sequel objective of Houffalize was rather unremarkable. The purpose of this objective was to linkup with units from Field Marshal Montgomery's Northern Group of Armies attacking from the north to seal the salient, cut Sixth Panzer Army's LOCs and finish the destruction of that Army. Unfortunately, Montgomery did not commence his offensive until January 6, 1945 by which time German forces had already started a withdrawal from the Bulge.

Third Army commenced its attack at 1000 hours on January 13 by III and VIII Corps in coordinated attacks on Houffalize and St. Vith. Slow initially, the attack gained momentum as a result of the pressure being exerted on the Germans from the north by Montgomery's forces. At last on January 16, elements of Third Army made contact with forces of VII (U.S.) Corps, then OPCON as part of First Army to Montgomery.⁴¹ On January 18, XII Corps kicked off its attack. With this attack, Third Army started the task of cleaning out the eastern part of the Bulge. Officially, the Battle of the Bulge ended on January 29, 1945 with the front lines restored close to where they were on December 16. (Figure 6) The Allies were then poised to resume offensive operations eastward toward the Rhine. Not surprisingly, Patton already had a plan--he started working on it at the height of Bastogne.

The Battle of the Bulge was successful from both a tactical and operational point of view. One could argue however, that more German forces could have been destroyed had Montgomery started his counteroffensive earlier or had the Germans been allowed to penetrate further to the west prior to the Allies cutting the salient. That argument is worthy of a case study of its own. For the purposes of this paper, Patton obviously was well versed in the practice of the operational art. The firm grasp of operational thinking he displayed during the Battle of the Bulge was immeasurable in its contribution to the success of that operation. Chances are high that Patton's contributions to this Battle probably kept the Germans from unhinging the Allied coalition.

FIGURE 6
MAP--ELIMINATION OF THE BULGE



Source: Pogue, The Supreme Command, p. 394.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS

In the preface to *The Ardennes: Battle of the Bulge*, Hugh Cole notes that the Ardennes battle was normally:

"fought," in the sense of exercising decisive command and directing operations, by the corps commander. The span of tactical control in these widely dispersed actions simply was beyond the physical grasp of higher commanders. These higher commanders could "influence" the battle only by outlining (in very general terms) the scheme of maneuver, allocating reserves, and exercising whatever moral suasion they personally could bring to bear.⁴²

Perhaps unwittingly, he accurately described in this passage some of the operational art so successfully practiced by General George S. Patton, Jr. during the Battle of the Bulge. Patton's success in this practice, linking tactical actions to strategic objectives, was a key contributor to the success of a crisis operation. The lessons learned are applicable for today's and tomorrow's operational commanders.

Vitally important is that clear objectives are established. Commanders must then clearly understand what the strategic objectives are and how the operational objectives link the tactical actions to these strategic objectives. Intermediate tactical and operational objectives must be established to support the strategic objectives. The required military conditions for accomplishing these objectives must be understood through the commander's intent and guidance.

To attain these objectives, commanders must recognize the centers of gravity of both their own forces and their enemy. Operations must be planned that will defeat the enemy's center of gravity while protecting our own. Any objectives that are established must have as an end goal the defeat of that center of gravity whether it is directly or indirectly.

Instrumental in the attainment of any military objective at the operational level is

intelligence that is accurately analyzed. Not only must a commander have intelligence pertaining to his own area of operations, he must also be abreast of enemy activities in his areas of interest that have the capability to affect his own operations.

A high speed of maneuver is at times instrumental in attaining both surprise and mass. This is especially true in today's multi-dimensional and technological driven battlefield. This same high OPTEMPO, given an effective command and control system, can be used to reduce the risk involved in an operation.

A high speed of maneuver also requires logistics. Operationally, logistics must be treated as a maneuver force. Commanders and logisticians must have the capability to anticipate logistical requirements and to maneuver logistics forces to meet these requirements.

Combined arms and joint operations can provide the commander with a synergistic effect. Commanders must synchronize these forces at the right time and at the right place to maximize this effect. Operational fires can shape the conditions on the battlefield to achieve this maximization.

Lastly, if faced with a situation (for whatever reason) where operational reserves are not available, commanders must take every action possible to minimize the associated risks. If the risk is still unacceptable, then commanders must obviously reevaluate the mission or ask for additional resources. To do otherwise is to take a tremendous gamble given today's fluid battlefield.

NOTES

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9. Bauer, p. 559.
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14. Cole, p. 487.
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29. Ibid., p. 191.
30. Ibid., p. 401.
31. FM 100-5, p. 12-3.
32. Farago, p. 710.
33. Robert S. Allen, quoted in Farago, p. 710.
34. Martin Blumenson, The Patton Papers: 1940-1945 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin and Company, 1974), v. 2, p. 523.
35. George A. Higgins, "The Operational Tenets of Generals Heinz Guderian and George S. Patton, Jr.", Unpublished Research Paper, U.S. Command and General Staff College, Ft. Leavenworth, KS: 1985, p. 96.
36. Patton, p. 200.
37. Essame, p. 229.
38. Allen, p. 250.
39. Higgins, p. 166.
40. Ibid., p. 167.

41. Farago, p. 728.

42. Cole, p. xii.

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